Phillips, Marguerite R

May - June 1918

(23)

Monitor, Alta.,
Thurs. May 16th. '18.

President Sir Robert Falconer,
University of Toronto.

Dear Sir,

Recently I spoke to you about the trouble which occurred in connection with my History examination last year, and also about the disordered state of the History course for the Fourth Year Modern Language Students in general. You then asked me to write a letter explaining what had occurred. As no one seemed to understand the affair at the time, this is rather a difficult task to perform a year after the event. However, I shall make it as clear as possible.

When I entered my fourth year, our History work was in charge of the History Department. It was the Fourth Year General Course History, and comprised the History of all the countries of Western Europe during the nineteenth century. The examination was to be set by the History Department.

[illegible] the following countries, namely;

There were also certain History requirements for the Modern Language Department. Consequently there was considerable overlapping in the two courses throughout the year.

Thinking, no doubt, to reduce this overlapping and to bring the conditions of History as a pass subject to coincide with the requirements of the Modern Language Department in History, this department busied itself throughout the year in trying to bring about some re-adjustment that would meet the requirements of both.

This change involved many difficulties, because, although all the students had to fulfil certain History requirements of the Modern Language Course, they did not all take it as a Pass Subject. Instead of this, one student was taking the History of Philosophy option, and two were taking Religion. To further complicate matters, some of the students had their History conditions imposed on them by the French Department only, some by the German Department only, and some by both.

Throughout the year the Department held in debate the possible courses for the solution of these difficulties, namely;

to set special examinations in History for those students not taking it as a Pass Subject, and consequently not called upon to write an examination for the History Department; second, to set special History questions on the language papers for this same class of students; or, third, the course finally adopted, to set a paper for all the students which would satisfy both the Modern Language and History Departments.

In this way, History, as a Pass-Subject for Modern Language students, came under the direction of the Modern Language Department. However, as not all the students had taken the complete course, it was narrowed down to the History of France and Germany (instead of all the Countries of Western Europe) during the nineteenth century. In this way it was thrown into an entirely different light, inasmuch as political events and international relationships, which had played such a great part in the History as required by the History Department, became, by this change only in so far as they

formed a background for Literature by their influence on the social and religious life of the country.

Throughout the year, I had attended two lectures a week by Professor Wrong, one a week in German History by Professor Lang of Victoria College, and, during part of the year, one lecture a week by Professor Will. I was obliged to miss a few of the latter because my mother had a stroke of paralysis which made it very difficult for me to continue my College course last year. I had also done a large amount of studying and reading for all these courses of lectures.

By the beginning of March I had covered my work in History. The course was re-adjusted some time in March. As I had already spent as much time on History as on any of my special subjects, I could not afford any more time to fit my knowledge of History to the new requirements of the course. Moreover, we could obtain no very definite information about the course. When we asked Professor Lang about it, he frankly confessed that he didn't

understand the arrangements, but assured us that we should not fail. Professor Will also assured us that we could not fail.

You said, sir, in our interview, that you believed petitions always received due consideration, and that students could always have their interests guarded by the Registrar of their College. It appears, on the contrary that these men lack either interest or influence in students' affairs, for after giving their word that we should not fail it seems hardly creditable that such a result should be deliberate. My sisters spoke to Professor Will, the Registrar of University College, about the matter immediately after the examination results were issued. He said he did not advise me to petition about the affair as petitions were humiliating. This is quite inconsitent with Professor Will's usual attitude. Ordinarily, he advises students to petition immediately.

This is why I say that students of the University of Toronto have no sure way of knowing that their cases receive justice.

Out of a class of some thirty students

of which between five and seven obtained first class honours, I ranked fourth in second class honours. In addition, I was the only one in University College who was carrying four major subjects. It appears, then, that one student, whose ability measures up to the average, can attend from three to four lectures a week in a pass subject, from highly representative professors, study conscientiously, and then fail in this subject, when another can take up the work at the end of the year after the course has been modified, and, by reading one book, pass the examination. When this occurs, is it to the credit of the University that it offers to allow the first student a mark or so to make up the required percentage, because she is in the Fourth Year, instead of adjusting matters so as to balance the incompetence of its own methods?

Thanking you for the interest you have taken in this matter, I remain

Yours Truly,

Marguerite R. Phillips.

June 12th, 1918

Miss M. Phillips,

Monitor, Alberta.

Dear Miss Phillips:

I have sent your letter both to Professor Wrong and Professor Will. Professor Wrong assures me that he knows of no re-arrangements which would have dealt unfairly with you. Professor Will has gone into the whole question at great length. He tells me that the reason that you failed in History was that the Examiners, Professor Morning and himself, were unable to bring you up above the pass mark. He is of opinion that if you had put more attention upon your work in History this result would not have happened. He tells me that he was watching your work carefully, and he spoke to you about the danger that might confront you. As to the result being due to confusion in the requirements he does not see how it was possible that in your case there could have been any confusion. Your course was perfectly clear. He also affirms very strongly that he never told you that you would pass.

As the case therefore now stands it seems to me to resolve itself into the complaint that you make against Professor Will and after having received this information from him and laid your letter before the head of the Department of History I do not see what further I can do in the matter.

Yours sincerely,

President.